

Testimony to be Delivered to an Informational Hearing
of the
Connecticut Appropriations Committee

Re: Budget for Community Colleges

Monday, February 28, 2011

Ms. Harp; Ms. Walker; Members of the Committee:

I offer this testimony today in support of Connecticut's vital community college system, with specific reference to Northwestern Connecticut Community College and Asnuntuck Community College, the two which I know best.

I am President of Sterling Engineering Corporation in Barkhamsted. We are a 70-year old, family-owned, woman-owned contract machine shop, employing 65 highly-skilled, highly-paid people in a very competitive environment. We produce large, complex machined components for the aerospace and power generation industries. I have served as President and 20-year board member of the Connecticut Tooling & Machining Association, as a Trustee and as Chairman of the Education Committee for the National Tooling and Machining Association, and as a charter member and board member of Connecticut's Aerospace Components Manufacturers. I also serve as Chairman of Charlotte Hungerford Hospital's Board of Governors.

I will focus my remarks today in three areas, one general, two specific. First, the importance of our community colleges in serving our employees and our employers, and serving the families of Connecticut, cannot be overstated. Community colleges provide educational opportunity for students who cannot afford higher-priced alternatives. This education enables them to secure meaningful jobs, and to become productive members of the workforce and our society. The colleges serve the employers of Connecticut, and our employees, by providing cost-effective general education and job-specific training to the workforce of Connecticut. Community colleges create jobs for our residents, and raise the skills and wages of our incumbent workforce.

Second, as President of Sterling Engineering, and as an active member and leader of industry groups, I can personally attest to the economic value our community colleges bring to the manufacturing world. In Barkhamsted we depend on Northwestern, which has served many of our employees and their families as a provider of general education. However, they have also provided, and sometimes created, focused courses in shop math, blueprint reading, root cause analysis, critical thinking and lean training. Without this reservoir of knowledge and training capability, a question exists as to whether Sterling Engineering would have survived the economic distress following the twin disasters of 9/11 and Enron. I will remind you that today we employ 65 people and are hiring and training more.

I want also to commend Asnuntuck Community College for the leadership work it is doing to train machinists, primarily for Connecticut River Valley employers. However, it is a magnet program, and draws students from a wide circle. Even though Barkhamsted is nearly an hour's drive from Enfield, Sterling has been able to recruit several machinists from that program.

Third, under vibrant leadership Northwestern has grown and developed into a fine, first-class provider of opportunity to our citizens and employers. Recently, with your support, the support of the Chancellor, and the unswerving leadership of our President, Northwestern has introduced a brand new nursing program. Dr. Barbara Douglass pursued and found broad community support for this effort, evidence of which is that she and a small band of citizens raised over \$1,000,000 to support a badly-needed nursing program. From my vantage point at Charlotte Hungerford, I assure you that the demand for skilled nurses in Northwestern Connecticut is strong and growing.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am a conservative man, and I strongly support balancing budgets...always. I know you have many difficult decisions ahead, and I appreciate the responsibility you have undertaken. However, I respectfully request that you tread lightly with respect to our precious community colleges. They are an important economic resource, especially during the uncertain economic times in which we live. They are educators; they are trainers; they both provide and create jobs; and they give young people a hand up. Please support them to the fullest extent of your power.

Respectfully submitted,

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Barkhamsted, Connecticut.